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Outline of Reference Paper On:

INTENSIFIED EXPLOITATION OF CHILD LABOR IN THE USSR

by

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Although Marxist theory originally regarded the use of child labor as an important element in the over all pattern of capitalist exploitation of the working class, the Soviet government has come to rely increasingly upon this age group as a supplementary labor force vital to the fulfilment of its economic plans. Accordingly, Communist theoreticians have gilded the pill of economic necessity by portraying child labor as a valuable educational tool in molding the "new Soviet man" of the future Communist society.

In 1940 the Soviet government decreed the compulsory annual mobilization of 800,000 to 1,000,000 Soviet youths aged 14 and 15 for schooling in various trades. A further four years of work in a selected state enterprise was made obligatory for these youths upon completion of their trade school training. Concurrently the Soviet authorities ruled that all children in collective farms over the age of 12 would be responsible for fulfilling a daily work norm. This official juvenile labor system is augmented by the massive "voluntary" programs of manual labor and seasonal farm work imposed upon Soviet children from an early age. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the total proportion of non-adult workers in the USSR is significantly higher than in Tsarist times.

Khrushchev's "note" of September 21, 1958 demanding that "... all pupils without exception, after completing seven or eight grades, should be sent to do socially useful work in state enterprises, collective

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farms, etc. ..." formed the basis for a law promulgated only three months later, despite unusually vigorous protests from Soviet parents and teachers. The real reason for Khrushchev's law is that without such a harsh measure the additional 12,000,000 workers expected to join the Soviet labor force by 1965 to help carry out the grandiose objectives of the Seven-Year Plan simply would not materialize, since the adult population is growing much too slowly.

Living in a country where there are no effective guarantees against their exploitation, Soviet children and adolescents might well envy the lot of their contemporaries in the much maligned capitalist countries who, at least, are protected against being forced to work by governments reputedly controlled by "capitalist exploiters"

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INTENSIFIED EXPLOITATION OF CHILD LABOR IN THE USSR

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Vasiliy M. Minyailo

In connection with the "Day of Soviet Youth", an annual Soviet holiday scheduled this year for June 28, it is instructive to recall various Soviet measures for intensifying the exploitation of juvenile labor. Further such intensification may be expected in order to meet the labor requirements of the new Seven-Year Plan.

The Seven-Year Plan for the development of the Soviet economy provides for an increase in the number of wage and salary earners in the USSR from 54,600,000 (in 1958) to 66,500,000 (in 1965); an increase of almost 12,000,000. The period covered by the Seven-Year Plan (1959-65) will see the addition to the labor force of those Soviet citizens who were born during the war and the immediate post-war years. The war and immediate postwar period was marked by a particularly low birth rate in the Soviet Union, and estimates show that the number of those born during this period will be insufficient to supplement the Soviet labor force to the extent envisaged in the Seven-Year Plan.

The question then arises as to where the Soviet government intends to obtain additional labor reserves during the coming years. Many of the measures adopted by the Soviet government in the recent past suggest that one of these sources will be child and juvenile labor-- the working capacity of millions of boys and girls compulsorily recruited as laborers.

It should not be forgotten that, while the Party Central Committee is striving to present itself to the world as the sole champion of children exploited in capitalist countries, child labor in the Soviet Union is not only legally permitted but has even been justified on the "ideological" plane. Communist theoreticians

maintain that child labor is a means of education, of remolding the family and society and of creating a new type of man-- the citizen of the "new Communist society".

The evidence shows, however, that in the USSR the use of child labor has come to serve purely economic objectives. Soviet statistics say almost nothing about its extent; but it is known that in 1940, just before the beginning of Soviet-German hostilities, the proportion of minors engaged in industry was 6 per cent and that by 1942 it had risen to 15 per cent, whereas in Tsarist Russia it was 3 per cent, one third of whom were girls. More recent Soviet data are not available, but estimates show that in 1958 the proportion of minors in relation to the total number of wage and salary earners in the USSR was 10 percent and that this proportion is growing steadily, partly as a result of the compulsory measures which the Soviet government has been adopting to recruit minors for manual labor. Until 1940, children in the USSR were obliged to work in industry solely as a result of indigence; i.e. the living conditions of their parents. The majority of children were unaffected by these circumstances and so the government decided to adopt compulsory measures. On October 2, 1940, a law for this purpose was introduced which, among other things, stated:

It is essential that between 800,000 and 1,000,000 persons yearly from the state labor reserves be prepared for transfer to industry... the Council of People's Commissars will be authorized to mobilize each year from 800,000 to 1,000,000 members of urban and collective farm youth aged between 14 and 15 years for trade and railroad schools.

City Councils of Workers' Deputies are every year to mobilize young people aged 14-15... in numbers that shall annually be determined by the Council of Peoples' Commissars of the USSR (Laws of the USSR and Decrees of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Moscow, 1956, pp. 371-72).

In this way, under the pretext of teaching young people a trade, the Soviet government in effect has designated millions of adolescents aged 14 and 15 years as manual laborers, for in the Soviet Union the process of teaching a trade consists for the most part in getting the pupil to acquire "working habits" through direct experience of manual labor in industry. After two years of such "training", the young worker, now 16 or 17 years old, is regarded, by virtue of this same law, as still liable to "mobilization" and is "...obliged to work for a further four years without interruption in a state enterprise in accordance with the instructions of the Chief Administration of Labor

Reserves of the Council of Peoples Commissars of the USSR...in return for a wage determined by the general rules in force." (Ibid., paragraph 10).

The resistance encountered by this law among young people provoked the government to take stronger measures. On December 28, 1940, the Supreme Soviet issued a decree imposing a penalty of confinement for one year in a labor colony for young people evading transfer to a trade school, absconding from such schools, or deliberately breaking disciplinary rules in order to get themselves expelled.

In Soviet agriculture, child labor is exploited to an even greater extent. In accordance with section 4, paragraph 7, of the model constitution for an agricultural artel, all children of kolkhozniks (collective farm workers) who have reached the age of 16 automatically become full members of the collective farms with regard to the fulfillment of labor norms, including the completion of an annual minimum of "trudodni" (work-day units). On October 2, 1940, the government went further by decreeing that the entire population of a kolkhoz (collective farm) from the age of 14 on was to be considered as fit for work. Finally, on April 1, 1942 the Party Central Committee and the Soviet Government ruled that definite annual norms for the fulfillment of work-day units were to be allotted to the children of kolkhozniks aged 12 and above. Evidently, even these measures failed to secure an adequate flow of young people into industry and agricultural production for in 1957 further steps were taken to this end. In this year, the Party Central Committee and Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a further resolution on this question which, so far as is known, was nowhere officially published as such (Partiinaya Zhizn, 1957, No. 1 18, p.59.).

The most extreme measure of all, however, was the "school reform" officially adopted in December 1958. The purpose of this reform became clear from Khrushchev's "note", published in Pravda on September 21, 1958, which aroused public opinion throughout the USSR. Although he tried to soften the effect of the proposed reform on public opinion by claiming that it was necessary if Communism was to be realized, Khrushchev defined its chief object unambiguously as follows:

In my opinion, all pupils without exception, after completing seven or eight grades, should be sent to do socially useful work in state enterprises, kolkhozes, etc. In the cities, the villages and the workers' settlements, all those graduating from school must go into productive labor-- no one can be exempted.

The publication of this "note" was followed by a "nation-wide discussion" in the Soviet press. Although this "discussion" was obviously inspired by the Soviet leadership and amounted to no more than the usual propaganda shift, it clearly demonstrated the negative reaction of many Soviet citizens to the new measure. It may be taken for granted that the Soviet press acknowledges the existence of what are known as "negative phenomena" only when these phenomena assume a scale which may threaten the stability of the regime. Consequently, if the press was obliged to publish large numbers of letters from citizens protesting under various pretexts against the introduction of the school reform, it may be assumed that the resistance of the population to this reform was very considerable. We quote one or two of these letters.

An iron-fitter named Motygin wrote:

Childrens' education should begin from the age of eight, not seven. After eight years schooling children must go into productive work, By that time they are only 15 years old and this, in my opinion, is too young for them to begin working (Pravda, December 5, 1958).

In the same issue, A. Tiki, a teacher from Tallin wrote:

The length of the first stage should be given careful consideration. In the opinion of most parents, it is most important that children should not be overloaded with study at school and at home..... In our view, not eight, but ten grades should be envisaged.

Many parents, in order to avoid the exploitation of child labor by the state, proposed that the schools teach Marxism-Leninism, a knowledge of which, they said, was essential for members of a Communist society. They further proposed that the total duration of school instruction be extended to ten or eleven years (Pravda, November 29, 1958). But all was in vain: the question had already been decided. On November 26, 1958, Pravda stated unequivocally in a leading article:

The reorganization of schools is necessitated not by any temporary, transient circumstances but by the vital needs of Soviet society. Our country has entered upon a new and important period of its development-- the period of construction on a large scale of a Communist society. Fulfillment of the great tasks imposed by the forthcoming Seven-Year Plan will be a decisive step toward our victory in the world competition between the socialist and capitalist systems.

The "nation-wide discussion" was concluded on December 25, 1958, by the publication in Pravda of the law embodying the main demands made by Khrushchev in his "note": "From the age of 15-16, all young people must take up socially useful work". This is the gist of the reform. Its practical significance for the Soviet economy was described in Khrushchev's "note" as follows:

If general-education schools are organized in this way, we shall have to transfer every year from 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 juveniles to work (in production).

Thus, during the next four years, the number of adolescents aged from 14 to 17 years engaged in the Soviet economy is to increase by something between 8,000,000 and 14,000,000, thus providing the additional numbers of workers required by the Seven-Year Plan.

It should be pointed out that the exploitation of child labor in the USSR is not confined to the legal forms which we have just been considering. Beginning from almost pre-school age, all children are given manual work to do within the framework of various mass campaigns that are ostensibly voluntary but actually virtually compulsory. The subbotniki and nedelniki (who are officially described as "giving their labor freely to the state on Saturdays and Sundays") and other kinds of spare-time workers, either seasonal or long-term workers, differ from normal production workers only in that they do not work under production norms laid down by the state and in that their work is unpaid.

This form of exploitation is widely applied in agriculture. It is evident from the Soviet press that here too such exploitation is being greatly intensified. The Party Central Committee issued the following appeal to the Pioneer organizations apropos of the Seven-Year Plan:

Young Leninists! At the present moment, our party and our people have no task more urgent than the fulfillment of the Seven-Year Plan. Be prepared to struggle for the cause of the Communist Party. Be prepared for great constructive work. In the cities and villages of our country thousands of detachments are now fighting for the right to bear the honorable title "Sputnik detachment of the Seven Year Plan". May the pioneers' contribution to the Seven-Year Plan grow from day to day.... By 1965, the country must harvest 10,000,000,000-11,000,000,000 poods (approximately 164,000,000-180,000,000 metric tons) of grain. Help older workers in the fight for a big harvest. (Pionerskaya Pravda, March 6, 1959).

Under Soviet conditions, such an appeal is virtually an order to Party and other organizations, and to school principals and teachers, who are already carrying it out. On April 14, 1959, Pionerskaya Pravda reported:

A school team (in the Sergievsk raion (area) near Kuibyshev oblast (region) has undertaken to grow 300 centners (30 metric tons) per hectare of corn for green fodder on a 75 hectare land area. For this purpose they fertilized the soil thoroughly last fall. During the winter, they twice collected the snow into heaps in order to gather as much moisture as possible. They have collected 189 centners (18,900 kilograms) of ash.... Inmates of the Lkeshilovo 'Childrens' Home, near Moscow oblast, last year grew 1,000 centners (100 metric tons) of corn per hectare for green fodder. This year, they are striving to improve this result.

The same paper reports that pupils of a school in the Krasnoyar-Meiskoe raion (Chuvash ASSR) will have to complete 29,500 work-day units in order to fulfil their field work as planned for the first year of the Seven-Year Plan. Similar reports crowd the pages of all the Soviet young peoples' press. Having proclaimed a nation-wide competition among schools, Pioneer detachments and individual pupils in raising productivity, the Central Committee of the Komsomol and the All-Union Ministry of Agriculture are intensifying and perfecting their methods for exploiting child labor. In order to mollify the indignation of Soviet citizens, Soviet propaganda is increasing its attacks on the "growing exploitation" of child labor in capitalist countries, accusing the USA, for example, along these lines. In doing so, however, Soviet propaganda overlooks the fact that in most such countries, especially the USA, child labor is forbidden and work by adolescents is purely voluntary and paid by the hour. In the USSR the situation is quite different: from the age of 14-15 onwards, work in production is obligatory. Moreover, as soon as the period of formal training in the trade concerned begins, this work is remunerated at piece rates calculated for adult skilled workers:

During training in workshops and as productive workers, the pupils must not only be given a skill and develop proper working habits, but must also learn to work at the rate expected in their trade.... All work without exception must be standardized with regard not only to the amount of time spent at work, but also to the quality of work expected, the quality of finish required, the degree of wastage allowed. (Professionalno-Tekhnicheskoe Obrazovanie, 1957, No.7,17-18).

According to the law of May 26, 1956 (published in Pravda on May 29), child labor in industry is remunerated at the piece rates applicable to adults, with the addition of a supplementary payment in compensation for the shorter working day. In agriculture, remuneration is even less since neither age nor lack of skilled qualifications is taken into account in that field. Section 6, paragraph 15 of the model constitution for an agricultural artel, published in 1937, states:

For every type of work, production norms are laid down which are feasible for the conscientious kolkhoznik, taking into account, as they do, the state of the draft cattle, machinery and soil.... Every type of work is assessed in work-day units according to the required degree of skill and the complexity, difficulty and importance of the work for the artel.

In the USSR, there is no protection of child labor in the strict sense of the term. The responsibility for seeing that labor conditions and safety measures are properly observed lies with the trade unions which, however, are also responsible for the fulfillment of state production plans-- a function which is completely incompatible with the protection of workers' interests. Consequently, the trade unions, like the officials of enterprises responsible for fulfilling state plans,, are obliged to extract the maximum of labor from the workers, irrespective of their age. With regard to child labor, the position is worse in the kolkhozes. Here there are no trade unions so that no one is responsible for protecting child labor. Generally speaking, it may be said that the protection of child labor in the USSR is in a chaotic state. Naturally, this situation becomes aggravated with every measure introduced by the state to increase the numbers of minors engaged in manual labor, so that the exploitation of child labor in the USSR is increasing.

This state of affairs is extremely significant, particularly in the case of a state which, according to its leaders, is building the most progressive society in the world, for, to a large degree, the extent to which child labor is exploited determines the living conditions of the people as a whole. This criterion was used at one time by Lenin. During the period when he was concentrating upon problems connected with the destruction of the "rotten and reactionary past" rather than on those concerned with the "construction of a Communist society" he wrote:

Undoubtedly, the greater the exploitation of child labor, the more the position of the worker is aggravated, the harder his life becomes (Works, 4th ed. vol. XIX.p.182).

This observation of Lenin's describes, as nothing else can, the present position of workers', both adult and juvenile, in the USSR. (062559)